CFS FACT SHEET - UNDERSTANDING AERIAL FIREFIGHTING

The CFS combats bush, grass, scrub and forest fires primarily through the deployment of fire appliances and firefighters for the protection of life, property and the environment. These resources are complimented in a number of areas of the State with farm fire units, as they are a valuable resource in the overall control strategy when available.

At times, firefighting operations may be supported by firefighting aircraft and/or earth moving plant and equipment. Firefighting aircraft are a limited resource and therefore CFS places these aircraft in locations where life and assets are at the highest risk. There is no guarantee that every fire in the State will be serviced by aircraft, and the primary form of fire suppression has, and will always be, firefighters on the ground.

Community expectations

The popular perception amongst much of the community is that aircraft alone can put out bushfires. This is not true. CFS firefighters and fire appliances for the vast majority of instances are the primary and only method of controlling bushfires.

In many cases smoke from the fire ahead of the fire front makes it very difficult, if not impossible, for aircraft to identify and bomb specific targets. Aircraft cannot fly through heavy smoke, as there is a real danger that dense smoke will cause a 'flameout' of the jet turbine engine which is used to power each rotary or fixed wing aircraft in the firefighting fleet.

Deployment of aircraft to fires

The deployment of aircraft to any fire is made after consideration of many variables, risks, aircraft suitability and aircraft availability. Once committed, the decision to attack a fire is made by the air attack supervisor and the CFS Officer on the ground, based on firefighting tactics and a dynamic risk assessment. This will include an assessment of localised weather conditions, the fire's behaviour, obstructions to aircraft in the area, smoke and its effect on visibility, assets at risk, and aircraft performance parameters.

The final decision to fly or not fly the mission remains with the pilot in command of the firefighting aircraft.

In some circumstances aircraft cannot be deployed due to other higher priority fires, unfavourable wind and weather conditions, adverse terrain or obstructions that prevent safe flying environments.

Where vertical obstructions exist in the airspace around a fire, such as powerlines, weather masts, radio and television transmission towers, tall trees and wind turbines, a dynamic risk assessment is undertaken prior to the aircraft being committed to fire bombing operations. In some circumstances aircraft will not be utilised because risks caused by vertical obstructions exceed safe operating conditions.

Hazardous Drones

In the event that a Remotely Piloted Aircraft RPA *(this includes Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) or Drones)* is detected operating within the vicinity of a fire, **CFS may suspend aerial firefighting operations until it is considered safe to resume**. If aerial firefighting operations are suspended, the CFS will instigate an immediate media alert to request that the drone operator cease operations, or if members of the community are aware of the drone operator to immediately contact Police.

For other information on the CFS Aerial Firefighting fleet, go to:

http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/about_us/what_we_do/aerial_firefighting.jsp